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UNCLAS THE HAGUE 002480

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SUBJECT: DUTCH RESPONSE TO POTENTIAL HIGH LEVEL BURMESE ATTENDANCE AT ASEM

REF: A. (A) MARTINEZ-BUCKNEBERG/BISHARAT/BARRASSO EMAIL

09/28/04

[1](#)B. (B) THE HAGUE 2461 (PM BALKENENDE ILLNESS)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Poloff spoke with Eric Verwaal, Head of Southeast Asia and Oceania Division and Special Assistant to EU Envoy Hans van den Broek September 28 to follow up Ref A message regarding the potential for Burmese participation in the October 8-9 Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) at a higher level than Foreign Minister. Verwaal said he had also heard rumors that the Burmese could potentially send a higher-level representative, noting that Burmese Senior General Than Shwe seems increasingly "more defiant" and such a scenario could therefore not be ruled out. Verwaal agreed that this situation "would create a serious problem" and that "the EU would have to react." He confirmed that "one of the options" would be that the EU could walk out of the meeting. Nevertheless, Verwaal was careful to caution that EU agreement on the matter would probably not be entirely uniform - and "only a certain number" of EU members would be likely ultimately to walk out.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Verwaal reiterated that the understanding reached between the EU, Japanese and Vietnamese meeting coordinators was that the Burmese would attend only at FM or lower level. He said the Dutch had pushed for only "official" level participation but that the Asians had held out for the Foreign Minister level. He commented that higher-level Burmese participation would thus create even more embarrassment for the Vietnamese hosts and Asian coordinators than for the EU. Verwaal said the Vietnamese would certainly know in advance of the meeting which Burmese officials planned to attend in order to carry out registration processing, and although he has asked the Vietnamese they have not yet responded.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The Dutch EU Presidency also confirmed September 28 that Luxembourg's Prime Minister will carry out the functions of the EU Presidency in the absence of Dutch PM Balkenende at ASEM (Balkenende is seriously ill as reported Ref B). Verwaal noted that this would consist of making remarks at the opening ceremony and contributing working-level representation to the coordinating committee. (Comment: Verwaal had also used the verbal construction the evening prior to official announcement of this plan that "one option" was for Luxembourg PM to carry out the EU role - lending credence to the "option" that the EU might indeed walk out.)

[1](#)4. (SBU) The Dutch are interested in comparing notes about the newly-appointed Burmese officials, and have stated previously that they would be willing to describe their negotiation process in further detail after ASEM and exchange ideas about handling upcoming ASEAN and related Burmese participation.

SOBEL